DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 350 185 SO 021 862

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TITLE Women in Academe: Progress, Prospects, and a Future Agenda.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (April 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Achievement; Consciousness Raising; Educational History; *Females; Higher Education; Opportunities; Social Change; *Women Faculty; *Womens Education; Womens Studies

ABSTRACT

This study assesses the changes that have taken place in the status of academic women by examining their experiences and achievements as students, as faculty members, and as administrators. The study looks at issues and environmental factors of special concern to women, such as affirmative action policies and practices, the role of women's colleges, the growth and influence of women's studies, the emergence of women's research and resource centers on campus, and the activities of women's committees and caucuses in professional associations. The findings of the study are reported in terms of major achievements, partial achievements, and future tasks. (KM)

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Prepared for
AERA Annual Meeting
April, 1990

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Background

I would like to begin by describing the background of the study that resulted in the Women in Academe volume. As we all know, there have been dramatic changes in the status of women in higher education since the emergence of the contemporary women's movement in the 1960s. During the 1970s the issue of equal educational opportunity was brought under growing scrutiny by academic women and civil rights groups, and widespread practices of sex discrimination moved onto the research agenda of scholars and became subjects for legal redress.

Two landmark volumes, published in 1973, documented the situation of women in higher education in the early stages of this movement. One was a volume of essays entitled Academic Women on the Move, edited by Alice Rossi and Ann Calderwood and published by the Russell Sage Foundation. The other was a report of the Carnegie Commission entitled Opportunities for Women in Higher Education. Both dealt with problems and issues relating to women as students, as faculty members, and as administrators. The reports presented research findings on topics ranging from sex differences in student enrollment patterns, degree attainment, and financial support to the underrepresentation of women in senior faculty and administrative positions. They also identified and chronicled the forces for change that were then taking effect -- the mobilization of academic women's groups to press for reforms, the use of affirmative action as a remedy for employment discrimination in higher education, and the development of women's studies as a means of dealing with sex bias in curriculum content.

The period following the publication of these studies witnessed continued efforts by women's rights groups, government agencies and foundations to improve educational opportunities for women, with some slackening of government support at the federal level after 1980. In order to examine the further progress women made during this period, a Task Force on Women in Higher Education was constituted early in the 1980s at the Russell Sage Foundation, with joint support from the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. The Task Force consisted of 15 members who were at the forefront of research and action in the field. Four of the Task Force members were among those who had contributed to the Rossi volume [including the chair of our session today]. Following a collaborative study which extended over four years, the Task Force prepared a comprehensive report which was published by the Russell Sage Foundation in 1988 and which is the subject of my presentation today. It's an interesting coincidence that in 1988, as in 1973, there were two overview volumes on women in higher education which more or less complement one another. Donna Shavlik was a member of our Task Force and kept us informed of the progress of her book.

Progress toward Equity

What are the conclusions of the study? How much progress have women made toward equity in higher education and how much remains to be done? Although we were primarily concerned with changes during the 1970s and 1980s, we briefly reviewed the historical background of women higher education. We found, of course, that over the long run women made steady gains in access from the time of their first entry into higher education in 1837. But we also found that there were periods of setback in their position relative to that of men. In the late nineteenth century, for example, some institutions introduced quotas for women students as a reaction to what was perceived as too large a growth in

their presence in the student population. Women continued to gain ground, however, until World War II, the aftermath of which turned out to be a period of severe setback. Crowded out by returning veterans and pressed by social expectations to marry early and raise children, women in the 1940s and 1950s lost many of the educational gains they had made in previous decades. The proportion of degrees awarded to women and the proportion of women faculty members dropped below pre-war levels. In 1950 women represented 24 per cent of those receiving the bachelor's and first professional degree, compared with 41 per cent in 1940. During the same period the proportion of women on college faculties declined from 25 per cent to 22 per cent. The situation began to change in the 1960s and women took rapid strides to catch up. They did not regain their pre-war position until the early 1970s, but continued after that on a path which has created a new era for women in higher education.

In assessing the changes that have taken place in the status of academic women during the past two decades, our study, like its predecessors, examined their experience and achievements as students, as faculty members and as administrators. Also included in the study were issues and environmental factors of special concern to women -- issues such as affirmative action policies and practices, the role of women's colleges, the growth and influence of women's studies, the emergence of women's research and resource centers on campus, and the activities of women's committees and caucuses in professional associations. The findings of the study are reported in terms of major achievements, partial achievements , and the tasks ahead.

Major Achievements

First the good news. We now have on the statute books a battery of legislation, much of it passed in the early 1970s, mandating equal educational opportunity for women.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, was amended in 1972 to prohibit sex discrimination in employment in educational institutions. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination in all educational programs receiving financial support from the federal government, including discrimination against students as well as discrimination in employment. While enforcement of this legislation leaves something to be desired, particularly with regard to employment, it has been indispensable in overcoming overt discrimination in the general rules and procedures of colleges and universities. Official policies no longer sanction restrictive practices against women in college admissions, financial aid, student services, and parietal rules. During the 1980s issues of sexual harassment also began to be addressed. This is not to say that discrimination is non-existent on campus. Subtle forms of discrimination do remain, particularly in the classroom, and these will be hard to eradicate, but by and large sex bias in institutional treatment has been corrected.

Another major advance for women in higher education over the last two decades is the introduction of affirmative action programs and procedures. There has been much controversy over affirmative action, and its effectiveness as a remedy for employment discrimination has been limited by lack of vigorous enforcement. Nevertheless, asffirmative action laws and regulations have helped to break down old patterns of faculty hiring that relied on the informal word-of-mouth network of professional colleagues and were clearly discriminatory. Faculty recruitment procedures today typically include public announcement of the opening, specific efforts to reach women and minority candidates and administrative review of the selection process and outcomes by the academic and affirmative action officers of the institution. Employment practices and procedures have been permanently changed to a more open system, and in that sense affirmative action must be considered a significant achievement in the drive toward equity for women in higher education.

With the elimination of discriminatory policies in admissions and financial aid, women made spectacular gains in enrollment and degree attainment in the period under review. In 1979 the number of women students enrolled in higher education institutions surpassed that of men, and at the present time -- or at least as of 1988, the most recent published data available -- women represent 54 per cent of total enrollment. In terms of degree attainment, women now earn a majority of all bachelor's and master's degrees and they have increased their share of doctorates from 13 per cent in 1970 to 35 per cent in 1988. At the same time there has been a large-scale movement of women into the traditionally male-dominated fields. Particularly striking is the massive entry of women into the professional fields of business administration, law, medicine and theology. The proportion of master's degrees in business administration earned by women increased from less than 4 per cent in 1970 to 33 per cent in 1988, and there were similar increases in law, medicine, and theology. Women also made impressive advances in the social sciences, where in some fields -- psychology, sociology, and anthropology -- women now exceed men in the number of doctorates earned.

While women have increased their representation in the traditionally male-dominated fields, they have continued to enter the traditional "women's fields" in large numbers and have increased their concentration in the humanities and in the professional fields of teaching, social work, library science, and nursing. Notwithstanding the predominance in the number of women in these professions, there is no field other than nursing that is female-dominated in terms of control of the sprofession. In the humanities, education, social work and library science as well as the scientific fields and other prestigious professions, men hold the preponderance of senior faculty and administrative positions. They also hold the leading positions in the professional associations. To some extent, the discrepancy between doctoral degree attainment and control of the discipline or

profession may be reduced over time as larger cohorts of women make their presence felt. But the discrepancy is also a result of the fact that within fields men are concentrated in the more prestigious and upwardly mobile specialties. Future studies of degree attainment will need to take a closer look at relative changes in the subspecialties.

At least as important as other advances that women have made in higher education since 1970 is the introduction and growth of women's studies as a formal area of teaching and research. Virtually unknown prior to 1970, women's studies began as a marginal enterprise on a few campuses, usually conducted on a voluntary basis by committed feminist scholars. Women's studies courses are now available on most campuses, whether as courses within existing disciplines or as an interdisciplinary field of concentration. Formal degree programs in women's studies have become widespread, and their numbers are still growing.

Our study traces not only the growth but the process of institutionalization of women's studies on campus. One of the first steps in the institutionalization process was the establishment of national fellowship programs for research on women by major national foundations such as Ford, Carnegie, Rockefeller and Mellon. These programs, beginning in the early seventies, brought strategic financial support and recognition to the fledgling field. The next step was the development of campus-based centers for research on women, beginning around the mid-seventies. There are also a number of off-campus or independent centers for research on women, including several that are primarily policy-oriented and based in Washington, D.C. All told, there are now some sixty such centers on the national scene, and they work as a coalition through the National Council for Research on Women which was formed in 1981. Meanwhile, new journals were created, providing outlets for the growing body of women's studies research, or "the new scholarship", as it came to be called. The most widely known of these is Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, which made its debit in 1975.

The process of institutionalization was further advanced by the founding of the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) in 1977. From the beginning, NWSA drew a large and diverse membership, including not only scholars but also administrators, school teachers, and a variety of practitioners.

During the eighties the status of women's studies continued to make gains. A notable milestone was reached in 1983 when it was given formal recognition as a degree specialty by the U. S. Department of Education for purposes of reporting on annual statistics of earned degrees conferred. Also notable is the establishment during the 1980s of endowed chairs in women's studies, now numbering a dozen or more.

Beyond the institutionalization of the field itself, there has also been an ongoing process of integrating the new knowledge and perspectives emerging from women's studies research into the mainstream liberal arts curriculum. To accelerate the process, a variety of curriculum integration programs have been undertaken with foundation or government support. These programs, which first made their appearance in the latter part of the seventies, include activities such as the preparation of guides to relevant literature and course material, curriculum revision workshops, faculty development grants for released time, and summer institutes. Most recently, curriculum integration efforts have concentrated on mainstreaming material about minority women.

I have dwelt at some length on women's studies, not only because of its extraordinary progress so far but also because of its future potential impact on higher education in the 1990s and beyond.

Partial Achievements

Turning now from the success stories to the not-so good news, there are two critical areas in which progress has been slow or halting. One is the representation of women in

faculty and administrative positions at the policy making level. The other is the rate of enrollment of minority women and their rate of advance as faculty members and administrators.

The percentage of women as full-time faculty members increased from 22 per cent in the early 1970s to 27 per cent in the early 1980s, but most of the gain was in untenured positions and in two- year institutions rather than four-year colleges and universities. Over the same period the increase in the percentage of women full professors was all but imperceptible. The progress of women in administrative positions is somewhat better -- increasing from 23 per cent in the mid-seventies to thirty per cent in the early 1980s. On the negative side, however, is the fact that salary differentials between men and women faculty members and administrators have widened during this period, and new salary data now available indicate that the disparity has continued to widen since then.

Gains in minority participation in higher education have also been disappointing. Minority women still lag behind white males in educational achievement and, for the most part, have not yet achieved parity with white women. There was a rapid growth in the college enrollment of minorities during the latter part of the 1970s but the growth tapered off during the eighties and the number and proportion of blacks actually declined. Asian Americans are the only minority group to show substantial gains in the eighties.

Unfinished Business

Given our progress to date, what further steps are needed to reach full equality for women in higher education? What are the tasks ahead?

First, we need to do more to address the problem of subtle discrimination in the classroom and in the campus at large. At the departmental level there are still behavioral differences in the treatment of men and women and a tendency to underrate the work of

women. Some institutions are making efforts to sensitize faculty members to the cumulative effects of such treatment on the self-esteem and aspirations of women students. More needs to be done along that line. Women's groups on campus also have a role to play in this regard, and several have already conducted surveys designed to raise awareness of the environment for women, including awareness of sexual harassment.

Second, we need to do more to provide for the needs of nontraditional students. Part-time and older students, a majority of them women, constitute a large and growing segment of the student population. Institutions of higher education have not thus far been fully responsive to the diverse needs of this population. Special courses and services have been offered to some extent, but by and large non-traditional students have not been brought into the mainstream of campus life. Equal educational opportunity without regard to age or sex requires more institutional flexibility than is the norm today.

A third area of unfinished business, and one of overwhelming importance, is the need to correct the imbalance of women in faculty and administrative positions. The next ten years will be a critical period from the viewpoint of faculty hiring and tenuring. Demographic trends indicate a high rate of faculty retirement and an upturn in the college-going age group of the population, a combination of factors that should make for an increase in the number of faculty openings unless offset by adverse economic or other external conditions. It is estimated that institutions of higher education will have to hire about 500,00 new faculty members over the next ten or fifteen years. It will be incumbent on caucuses and commissions of professional associations and other academic and women's rights groups to monitor the appointment process and outcomes closely. The number of qualified women candidates is large and growing, but without vigorous affirmative action efforts they may never attain a proportionate share of positions on college and university faculties.

Finally, there is a need for improvement in the collection of national statistics on higher education. Although data on enrollment trends and earned degrees are reported annually by the Department of Education, information about the number and composition of faculty members and administrators is woefully inadequate. Data are often two years out of date, and sometimes longer. Classification by racial groups are hard to come by. In our study, we had particular difficulty getting relevant statistics for minority women and not until the mid to late seventies did such data begin to come in. Higher education faces a huge challenge in meeting the needs of minority students and faculty, and better data resources would help meet that challenge.

To sum up, significant gains have been made and much remains to be done, but with continued vigilance and sustained efforts on the part of women's groups and their friends, we remain moderately optimistic about the prospects for women in higher education.